

Features

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An introductory adventure by Ed Handley.

'The Story Of The Leaper': A folk tale of The City.

'Project DeepCode (part 2)'

Concluding the adventure nugget from MET3.

'A Touch Of Pepper'

Guidelines for pepperbox sparklocks in a/state.

'Art And Artistry'

An interview with CGS artist Paul Bourne

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met4

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A complete introductory adventure for a/state set in the murky underworld of the Mire End cripplecut circuit.



House Fire Kills Family

A house fire in Mire End tragically killed seven members of one family recently.

The fire, which consumed a tenement block on Southern Street, started in the early hours of the morning.

The Longlangley family were all abed when the fire began, witnesses say. The dead were: Mr Darrien Longlangley, Mrs Colette

Longlangley and five children of the Longlangley family.

Speculation is rife in the community that the fire was started on purpose. Mr and Mrs Longlangley are known to have strong connections to various movements promoting the integration of Mire End into the TCMA.

No residents of Southern Street were available for comment.

No Further Moves On Rail Line

Despite repeated enquiries by this journal, the Ancient & Honourable Guild of Fulgurators has so far declined to comment further on the Mire End rail line issue.

This issue was raised by the Mire End Tribune in recent weeks.

Families living on the long abandoned line are currently living with the fear of losing their homes. "It bain't right," stated an anonymous member of the community, "My family has lived here for bloody years. They can't throw us out now!"

Cripplecut Carnage!

A cripplecut fight at the old Mire End Terminus ended in carnage this week.

Supporters of one of the fighters took violent action at the end of a bout, resulting in numerous injuries.

Our reporter on the scene stated that:

"It was just a huge melee. Firearms were used at one point and several people were seriously hurt."

The fracas was only quietened with the intervention of local worthies Victor Scree and Tony Arthur.

Fruit Benny's Ready For Action (Allegedly)!

More On Page 6

Mysterious Benefactor

A mystery benefactor recently gifted a large sum to the Third Church Home For Unwanted Children.

The home, which looks after nearly four hundred Mire End foundlings, has suffered damage in recent months.

Father Guy Herbert of the Third Church said: "It is a delight and a pleasure to receive this gift. I would be even more delighted to find out the name of the benefactor in order that myself and the children could thank him or her in person."

The sum was said to be in the region of "several hundred pounds" and will be spent on structural repairs and educational materials.

Mire End Scurt Racers Celebrate!

Members of the local Mire End scurt racing league celebrated their inaugural meet last night.

Over ten people turned up to watch an evening of lacklustre scurt racing action.

Hans Bedekker, organiser of the event, said: "When the racing finished, the crowd went mild."



small ads

Wanted: Stout hearted Mire Enders for neighbourhood defence. Meeting at Shale Hall 20th hour, day after tomorrow.

How do we keep prices so low? Everything is stolen, we buy from thieves! Corner of H-Street & Powell, 20th to 25th hour, every second evening. Ask for 'Hugo'.

Sale: TCMAA residency permit, hardly used; only slightly torn. Reasonable offers.

Make it big! Leave your life behind and clamber up the social ladder. Many opportunities. Call Folly Hills 2345 678 2091.

Burgh meeting. Say no to the Fulgurators and their bully-boy tactics. All welcome. Redberry Park.

For sale. Chair. Only two legs, hence sale. Ideal for man with good balance. 3s. 234B, Brookmyre Walk, Folly Hills.

Easy path to riches. Ask me how! Simple course, only £2. Apply loft room, 3rd floor, 56 Garside Lane, Mire End.

Join the Komrades! A new life awaits you in the Red Canal Collectivist Republic! All for the benefit of all!

Children under 6 years old? Exciting military careers possible. Money for you, career for your child. Loads of opportunities available. 90 Twee Canal Walk (second floor, knock three times).

Mysteries of The Shift explained! Ancient secrets revealed! Warts & boils cured! Only 1s per person (no reduction for children). Every night this week, Overtoun Buildings, Folly Hills.

scurt racing

The latest Scurt race statistics from Hans' basement in Mire End. Ask for Stumpy the ex-cripplecut fighter, tell him Uncle Bob sent you. Yesterday's race got to a late start due to settling of accounts between two of the assembled sponsors. Stumpy, however, was able to clean things up and after a short delay, the race began. Nasher had an early lead with Nippy right on his tail, literally. On the third lap, Spike diverted from the course and raced up the leg of local purveyor, Marie "Black Hands" Muller. Marie, her hands still bandaged from her encounter with now former Provost, Tucker Harris, required help from her bodyguards to remove Spike.

After five laps, it was Hairbag, by a nose...

from the grounds

Releases

To follow up on the release of a/state, the supplement schedule (as it stands at the moment) is as follows:

The Lostfinders Guide To Mire End

A 32 page guide to the forlorn burgh of Mire End. The 'Lostfinders Guide' features new background, locations, NPCs and adventure nuggets.

Avenues & Alleyways

Packed with new burghs, locations, notable buildings and information on life in The City, 'Avenues & Alleyways' will be an indispensable guide to the tortured urban maze.

Iron Ring

Delving deep into the mysteries of The City, 'Iron Ring' expands the horizons for adventure in a/state and opens up whole new realms of possibility.

Also coming soon are free or very affordable PDF releases. These are:

Consequences of Debt

A free convention pack, featuring a three hour adventure and five pre-generated characters. The PCs must race against time to pay off a substantial debt to the local criminal boss or pay the heavy consequences.

Gone To The Dogs

A very affordable adventure download, 'Gone To The Dogs' can slot into almost any ongoing a/state campaign or be used as a convention adventure. What is going on at Folly Hills dog track? Why are the punters staying away? Why are unfancied nags winning races? Is there a darker secret lurking at the track?

the reading list

Iain

Reading: 'The Fellowship of The Ring' (the book of the film of the book) by Some Author You've Never Heard Of.

John

Reading: Haynes Manual for Honda Camino 50cc scooter. Listening: 'Youth & Young Manhood' by The Kings Of Leon, 'The Main Event' by Fingathing.

Malcolm

Reading: 'Veniss Underground' (novel) by Jeff Vandermeer, 'Nightside The Long Sun' (novel) by Gene Wolfe. Listening: 'Myths & Imaginary Musicians' by Even In Blackouts, 'Bad Dreams' by Swollen Members.

Paul

Reading: 'So Long And Thanks For All The Fish' (novel) by Douglas Adams. Listening: 'Give It A Twist' by Fitz Of Depression, 'Hagfish' by Hagfish, 'Laughing Gallery' by Ruth Ruth.



art & artistry

An interview with CGS artist Paul Bourne

So, how did you get involved with the entire Contested Ground Studios thing?

I'd known Malc for a few years and at the time, we hadn't been in contact for several months. One day, Malc just phoned up for a chat and to catch up on old times. We got talking about a game that Malc had been working on and had a lot of good ideas for and I offered to do a few pictures for a website that he was planning as a free forum for the game. It all just snowballed from there.

How long have you been perfecting your digital art technique for?

I've been working with digital art for eight or nine years now. It all started with Jimmy and I messing around with a really early version of Truespace not knowing exactly what it did or realising its full potential. Coincidentally, we actually designed a few logos for Malc at that point, for some other game he was creating at the time. I first started my art website, 'The Rendering Engine', in 1998 after getting seriously involved with Bryce v3. To be honest, though, The Rendering Engine website hasn't been touched in over a year, as I've just been too busy working on other projects.

What methods did you use prior to embarking on the use of digital art techniques?

Prior to being a digital artist, I was an airbrush artist from about the age of twenty. That work was mainly on large scale and was very labour intensive. It would take perhaps two to three weeks to finish one piece, whereas in a digital medium, the same (or better) results can be achieved in just a matter of hours.

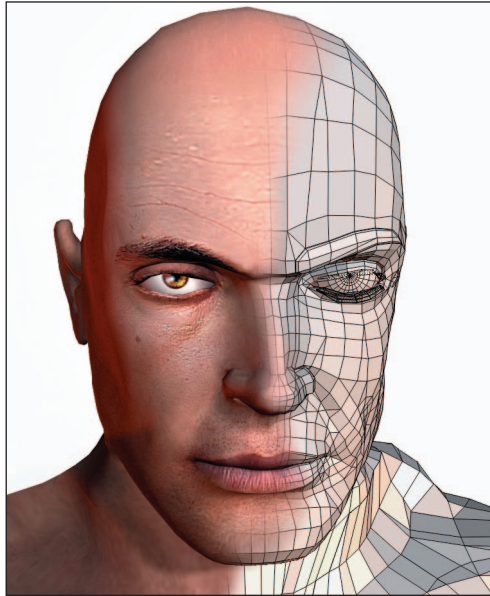
Do the same artistic methods apply to digital art as they do to traditional art or do you find yourself using vastly different skills?

In certain respects, yes. Attention still needs to be paid to shape and form, as well as colour, but where it's easy to have artistic license on paper, it's not so easy in a digital medium. Working digitally, you have to treat it almost like you're making a movie. You have to pay close attention to camera angle and lighting. Lighting, when done properly, can make an image work or totally destroy it. It's all a matter of atmospherics and what kind of feeling you want to portray.

Other than a/state, what projects have you been working on recently?

I've currently been doing a series of book covers for an author in America as well as an album cover for the punk band I used to play bass in! I've also created a couple of logos for a CGI video company based in Scotland and some magazine work.

How do they vary in style and content from a/state art?



The book covers for the American author are a bit of a departure from a/state, as the target audience is, in the main, much younger. So, the work has to have a 'lightness' to it and can't be too extreme in its imagery. Doing the album cover was interesting, as it demanded a more design orientated approach. 3D art was no good for this particular project, so I had to primarily use 2D design and photo-manipulation packages.

There is a certain 'darkness' to most of the work you've done for a/state, what are your reasons for taking this approach?

The text demanded it. What Malc had written, even in the early days of the project, had a certain 'noir' feel that wanted to be portrayed in the pictures. It just seemed to make sense to make the imagery dark and, in a sense, oppressive.

You received many accolades and awards for the 'Rendering Engine' website. Are you planning to continue with this site or is it a project that's now run its course?

There are plans to continue The Rendering Engine at some point. But, a/state is such a substantial ongoing commitment, and with the advent of more releases from CGS and work coming in from other sources, it's going to be hard to find the time to do any work that's primarily for the site.

In typical interview style, are there any artists, working in any medium, that you particularly admire and for what reasons?

Jack Vetriano, not only because he is a Scottish artist, but because there is a certain uncomfortable undercurrent to his work that is not entirely obvious. And for some strange reason, it just makes me smile.

Craig Mullins, the artist to whom all digital artists should look to. The quality of work and attention to detail is astounding. I don't know how he can find the time, to be honest!



the story of the leaper

A folk tale of The City

'The Story of The Leaper' is a traditional tale in The City, one told by mothers and fathers to their children at bedtime. It features two of the most prominent characters in the mythology of The City: The Leaper and Iron Lady. In these trying times, the common folk look upon The Leaper as a protector, a guardian against the evil of The City. The position of Iron Lady is more ambiguous. She is neither reviled or loved: merely feared...

"Back in a time of legend, a wonderland before The City existed, the man who became The Leaper lived. A happy life he lived, until The Shift came and imprisoned men in this dominion of brick and iron. The Leaper survived the time of The Shift, he danced around the falling fire of The Bombardment, he wandered the lonely streets of what had become The City.

It was during these wanderings that the man who was, became The Leaper. He was gifted wings of light, he leapt from ruined building to ruined building, flitting across the sky with the joy of brief freedom. He crossed and re-crossed the place that had become The City, watching the tribes, the platoons, myriad fallen survivors of that dark time. Above it all, he leapt through the sky, dancing on air.

As the years rolled by, The Leaper realised he was different to those around him. While the people lived their short lives, from squalling babies to disease raddled old-age, he remained young, never changing, ever youthful. The Leaper grew lonely, the weight of many years pressing down upon his frail shoulders. His wings of light still threw him aloft, but the joy was gone.

Then, in the darkest depths of The City, The Leaper met Iron Lady. Clad in black metal, she strode without fear through the darkest places. The bullets and bolts of her enemies were as the dropping of rain to her. Laughing, she walked through fields of fire and storms of blood. Iron Lady feared no man or woman, yet she too knew the fear of loneliness, the gulf of decades.

The Leaper and Iron Lady knew each other for what they were. They met and embraced, finding solace in each others company. Laughing, they returned to The Leaper's eyrie high in the ruins of the tallest tower in The City. For the first time in many a long year, they knew love, light and happiness. The Leaper embraced Iron Lady and she likewise.

But The City grew around them, encroaching on their lonely eyrie. The people clamoured for space, for life and light. They besieged The Leaper and Iron Lady in their high castle, bringing down the walls with hooks of iron and balls of rock. Iron Lady determined to smite the attackers with her terrible arsenal, yet The Leaper forbade her. The Leaper simply wished to move from this place, to find another eyrie far away from the cacophonous mob.

In the midst of the chaos, The Leaper and Iron Lady's love was torn apart. Across the eyrie they battled, The Leaper wheeling in the sky as Iron Lady hurled bolts of light and fire. The Leaper responded with arrows of silver light, cartwheeling through the air on his diaphanous wings. Finally, exhausted, The Leaper and Iron Lady summoned their reserves for one last strike.

Together they hurled their bolts and arrows, striking with furious anger and terrible vengeance. His wings flickering, The Leaper fell from the sky, crumpling and tumbling as he spiralled to the cold, hard ground. Iron Lady also fell, plummeting from the eyrie, her black armour scorched and broken. The clamouring mob was silenced by their grief at the death of The Leaper and Iron Lady. Slowly they parted and merged back in to the darkness of The City.

Yet, on the darkest nights, when The City is shrouded in mist, you might strain to see a flickering figure flitting through the air on wings of light. Some say The Leaper yet lives, forever searching for his lost love, for Iron Lady. And somewhere, there beats a heart clad in scorched black. For the bodies of The Leaper and Iron Lady were never found, to be interned in a place of honour. They still live among us, protected by black iron and carried on wings of light. "



Project DeepCode (part 2)

After the incidents of Project DeepCode (part 1), and depending on what happened in those incidents, the PCs may find themselves variously injured, incarcerated, beaten or interrogated. After these various diversions have been concluded, they will end up in the same place: a small tea shop in Folly Hills named The Gaggling Boatman. Crowded into a wooden booth, they will have an unrivalled opportunity to quiz Juliane Cholmondeley. He's pretty terrified by this point and would be willing to sign a confession saying he's Ticktock Man, if only the PCs would let him go.

In between fits of tears, shaking, protestations of innocence and so forth, the players will deduce that the men who boarded the train were simply thugs working for a local bookie and that there aren't really any dark forces working against him. He will, however, plead with the PCs that, out of the goodness of their hearts, they should still take the job and help him out. Will they? Of course they will!

The possibilities

Longshore University

Longshore has the most extensive library in The City outside of The Cathedral (home of Sideband Media). Gaining access to the library may not be so easy. Bribing portreeves is a possibility, as is sneaking in. However, the most likely method (and the one with the best chance of success) is to forge some student ID and just attempt to brazen it out.

Once in the library (by hook or crook), the group will have to deal with the librarians and the ever present Mr Jagger, the head librarian. Jagger is actually a fairly kindly man, although the PCs will probably mistake him for a shuffling old buffer in carpet slippers. Underneath it, he's a fearsomely intelligent man who'll instantly twig that the PCs are not as bona fide as they make out to be. That having been said, he loves an adventure and will guide the group towards the massive stacks of reference cards and the looming brass key-boards which serve to access the library's massive dingins buried deep under ground.

Use of investigation, mechanical computing and related skills will yield some valuable information. This will, however, require hours of trawling through cards and dingin files. Eventually, in a fifty year old dissertation (which Jagger will charge £2 to have copied, if the PCs so desire), they will find what they have been looking for. Stahlbruder Language was in fact part of an encryption system used by the Fulgurators.

The Sideband Archives

Far more fiscally orientated than Longshore University, Sideband knows the power of information. Therefore, Sideband knows exactly how much to charge for information. In the public areas of The Cathedral, there are tiny, cramped, hot booths manned by low-level archivists. For a nominal fee (in cash, up front) anyone can have an archivist access the publicly available archives. Now this does not, obviously, include the non-dingin accessible parts of the Archive (which counts for the vast majority of the reservoir of knowledge).

Should the PCs choose to access the Archive, they'll meet (in the confines of the aforementioned cramped booth) a rather stressed and weary archivist named Conny Birtwhistle. Birtwhistle is fed up and tired and will demand payment up front (£1 for ten minutes of her time). Unenthusiastically dredging the dingins, she'll eventually come up with a the following scraps of information:

Stahlbruder Language was invented by the Fulgurators. It was part of an encryption system.

Beyond that, the Sideband Archive yields nothing.

Visit The Bookie

In the tradition of wronged parties everywhere, the PCs may decide to exact some sort of revenge on those who inconvenienced them. In this case, the inconveniencing party was headed by a Folly Hills bookie and criminal lowlife called Nathaly Underbridge. The only intimidating thing about Underbridge is her very low level Hohler Gang connections as part of a local syndicate headed by one Merryn Lardner. The PCs can eventually track her down taking bets on a fist-fight up an alley in western Folly Hills. Underbridge will be abrasive or charming as the situation warrants. Like most petty criminals, she can realise fairly quickly when things are going her way. If it looks like things are going to go badly for her, she'll apologise, cancel Cholmondeley's debt and offer to buy the PCs a drink. If it looks like she can put the squeeze on the PCs, she'll try and provoke a fight between them and some of her 'associates' hanging about the peripheries of the fight.

Eventually, the PCs will be tracked down by Hartmann and Hook: the two flowghosts who have been following them ever since they met Cholmondeley at Folly Hill Central Station. The two of them will be pleasant, but fairly insistent that the players reveal what they have found. Should the PCs get violent, Hartmann and Hook will defend themselves with skill and daring.



Conclusions

The upshot of the entire investigation is that Stahlbruder Language isn't actually anything to do with the deep code, rather it is (or was) part of an encryption system used by the Fulgurators. Although it was abandoned over a century ago, there are many old Fulgurator archives hanging about somewhere in the Dataflow that could be accessed using the information. Most of the information would be of a fairly low quality, and pretty ancient, but it could still be of use to someone. More importantly, the PCs will have made valuable contacts in the form of Hartmann and Hook, the two flowghosts who have been following them around. Cholmondeley will also be eternally grateful to the group for helping him out of a rather sticky situation.

faces in the crowd

In this issue of the Mire End Tribune, all of the NPCs presented relate to the 'Project DeepCode' adventure nugget.

Juliane Cholmondeley (the inept flowghost)

Age: 41
Height: 5' 4"
Weight: 9st
Eyes: Watery green
Hair: Greyish black
Affiliations: Very low-level connections with Project DeepCode

An inept and somewhat half-arsed flowghost of no great repute. Cholmondeley is a snivelling little man of no great social skills or intelligence. He became a flowghost (of sorts) due to the lack of heavy lifting and because of the fact he could stay indoors for most of the time. Strenuously averse to physical exercise, he has the build of a glass of water and the perspicacity of a weeks old corpse. Hence, he isn't a very good or successful flowghost and is something of a laughing-stock in the Folly Hills 'ghost community. In fact, "pulling a Cholmondeley" has become a popular phrase whenever someone makes a ludicrous or humorous mistake in flowghosting circles.

Hartmann & Hook (the two Project DeepCode flowghosts)

Hartmann
Age: 43
Height: 5' 10"
Weight: 14st
Eyes: Dark brown
Hair: Dark brown
Affiliations: Project DeepCode

Hook

Age: 35
Height: 6' 1"
Weight: 13st
Eyes: Grey
Hair: Jet black
Affiliations: Project DeepCode

Perennially bickering, fractious flowghosts, Hartmann and Hook are the best of friends, business partners and investigators of the highest calibre. Considerably different from the prototypical flowghost, they are smart, strong, wise in the ways of the street and better armed than your average cryptologist.

Hartmann and Hook are the 'velvet glove' of Project DeepCode, used when things require subtlety and tact. All they really want to do is get a handle on what Cholmondeley has found, but are curious as to why he has contracted the PCs. They will only resort to violence or intimidation as a last possible resort.

Hartmann is a moderately plump man of early middle age. He affects impressive sidewhiskers and twirls them with his thumb and forefinger whenever he is deep in thought. Hook is slightly younger and considerably more physically impressive. He has a strenuous fitness regime which he sticks to with almost maniacal precision. It is the source of much humour on Hartmann's part and no little irritation on Hook's part.

Nathaly Underbridge (the bookie)

Age: 27
Height: 5' 7"
Weight: 10st
Eyes: Green
Hair: Dirty brown
Affiliations: Folly Hills betting syndicates, low-level Hohler Gang connections.

She's cold, calculating and cynical (to put it mildly) but can be quite charming and even sophisticated when she wants to be. Slim and elegant, this is somewhat wasted by a wardrobe which seems to consist of second hand dogskin coats and battered old hats. Looking through the layers of grime, many men have fallen for Nathaly Underbridge, a mistake which they have made at their cost. Her dark hair is tied back with a strip of dogskin but constantly escapes in wisps around her fine-boned face. She's involved with a small gang who have fairly low-level ties with the local Hohler Gang outfit, The Four Fingers Crew.



Mr Jagger (the Longshore University librarian)

Age: 72
Height: 5' 7"
Weight: 10st
Eyes: Sparkling blue
Hair: Grey
Affiliations: Longshore University

Not at all what you'd imagine from a librarian, Mr Jagger is a spry, energetic individual of advancing years. His age is belied by his enthusiastic demeanour and (when not within the confines of the library) his booming voice.

Mr Jagger (nobody is certain if he has a first name or not) has become part of the furniture at Longshore, tending the stacks of the library with care and delicacy. If truth be known, he seldom ventures off campus in these uncertain days, preferring to remain within the precincts of the university, surrounded by the familiar faces of faculty members. Indeed, many of the academic staff have a deep, abiding respect for Mr Jagger due to his eidetic knowledge of almost every file in the library, his memory for faces and fantastic ability to be on the winning team for the annual Inter-faculty Lampshade Memorial Quiz (the librarians were banned from having their own team after twelve straight victories).

Conny Birtwhistle (Sideband Media archivist)

Age: 22
Height: 5' 3"
Weight: 7st
Eyes: Blue
Hair: Dark blonde
Affiliations: Sideband Media

Conny is one of the many thousands of low-level clerical employees of Sideband Media, the toiling masses who do the real legwork in the organisation. Like many clerks, if you wind her up the wrong way, the chances of getting any information or assistance are minimal.

Treat her nicely, and there's a better chance of getting what you want. Conny is short and slight, clad in a fourth or fifth hand suit purchased from a fairly scummy clothes shop.

the workshop**A Dash Of Pepper**

Sparklocks are downright dangerous items to haul around: twitchy at the best of times, they are unreliable and unpredictable. Yet, they are the most commonly available firearms in The City, carried by Provosts, gangers, guttersnipes, dollymops,

conmen and entrepreneurs alike. For some, however, the regular sparklock isn't enough. For these people, even a fearsome double-barrelled version doesn't have quite the requisite firepower. For these people, the pepperbox is the only answer.

A pepperbox is, put simply, a series of single shot weapons arranged around a common firing mechanism and grip. Each barrel contains ball, powder and electrode and is either turned by hand, clockwork or other mechanism to bring a loaded barrel into line with the contacts which will spark the electrode. They can have between four and twelve barrels, with a number between six and ten being most common. To provide the power to fire the weapon, they are normally wired into a capacitor pack worn on the belt, slung beneath the arm or tied to the leg. This pack will generally have enough power to fire all of the barrels once before being recharged by the normal means (a clockwork generator, direct current, etc).

The cheapest variants are generally the most crude, being simple six barrel affairs where a new barrel is brought into line by grasping the entire barrel cluster and turning it by hand. Some more expensive pepperboxes have mechanisms that turn the barrels as the trigger is being pulled, bringing a loaded barrel into line when necessary. Another variant uses a small clockwork mechanism to turn the barrels. This is generally set to happen just after the trigger has been pulled and the gun has been fired, the clicking and buzzing of the clockwork being a fairly inconsequential noise when compared to the noise of firing.

**Light Pepperboxes**

Amongst the most expensive of this type of weapon, these are generally intricate weapons of relatively low power. Popular with dollymops or as a last-chance weapon with people who carry more serious firepower, you'd need to be rather unlucky to be killed by a shot from one of these.

Damage: 5
Penetration: 4
Range: 5
ROF: 3
Reaction Mod: +10
Clip: 4 to 10, varies
Weight: 1kg
Availability: Uncommon
Cost: £50



Medium Pepperboxes

The most common form of pepperbox weapon, they are slightly less powerful than a regular sparklock of equivalent size, but have the advantage of having more rounds of ammunition to play with.

Damage:	6
Penetration:	5
Range:	5
ROF:	3
Reaction Mod:	+10
Clip:	4 - 10, varies
Weight:	1.3kg
Availability:	Common
Cost:	£50

Heavy Pepperboxes

Large, often cumbersome (especially in the variants with more than four barrels), these are weapons for those who really mean business, want to look hard or value a fair number of heavy calibre balls being slung about in a fairly short space of time. Four-barrel versions are most common, using the same sized balls as a regular heavy sparklock. Not exactly subtle, they are intimidating, serious weapons with a reputation for hideous wounds to both the firer and the target.

Damage:	8
Penetration:	5
Range:	10
ROF:	2
Reaction Mod:	+5
Clip:	4 - 8, varies
Weight:	2kg
Availability:	Uncommon
Cost:	£70



Shadows on the water.

A Complete Introductory Adventure
by Ed Handley



"Mire End. Teeming slum on the edge of the TCMA. Stamping ground of the Hohler Gang and of hope for a better future. My new home. From Fogwarren anything is a step up, even if the ground floor of this piss-hole flat is six inches deep in water. I love this place, really I do, but sometimes 18' by 20' over an abandoned shop with mildewed walls and paper peeling from the ceiling is just not enough. That or I'm sick to death of hearing the bastards upstairs banging all hours.

My arm itches. A crust of dried blood is a russet stain on the dirty bandage. At least it keeps me from scratching at the stitches that are holding my arm together. Probably a good thing. Something else I'm sick to death of is washing and re-wrapping bandages. It's not my idea of fun.

The worst thing though is not being able to practice. Mickay wants me back in his fights. For all the shit about playing it out and using loads of small cuts rather than hitting the vicious stuff and putting people out for months.

Shit! I have had enough. I don't care what Mickay says about those Hohler arseholes. I'm going out for a drink."

plot summary

Vic Scree and Tony Arthur are low-level Hohler Gang enforcers who recently lost a fair amount of money betting on a cripplecut fight. They'd really like to get back at the fighter who won as they are convinced (quite rightly, as it happens) that he was a ringer. Unfortunately, their superiors are interested in the fighter and don't want anything to disrupt his recovery. Their solution? Pay someone even lower down the food chain to do their dirty work for them. This means the player-characters, a disparate group of young friends trying to make something of their lives.

the deal

Arthur and Scree will undoubtedly find the characters in that most ubiquitous of places to find people who are willing to do unpleasant jobs for whatever money they can get; the local pub. In this case a fairly low dive called The Locomotive, a few streets over from the abandoned Mire End Station. They'll be none too cagey about their Hohler connections, figuring that might discourage any attempts to haggle with them, or of the fact they are looking for people to put some hurt on someone. If the PCs don't pick up on the opportunity themselves, then one of the barmen will nod meaningfully in the direction of their tab (which has been steadily increasing for a few weeks now) and suggest they direct their attention to the shady looking men offering work.

Arthur will do the talking once they have the PC's interest, explaining the pair's irritation with Ward and their desire to see some harm come to the young cripplecut fighter (they will be clear that they do not wish it to be fatal harm). As a fan of cripplecut Simon Stark would know who the pair are after if the player can make an INT roll at -10. If this is the case provide the players with a copy of Issue 3 of the Mire End Tribune and point them to the cripplecut fight report. Arthur will open with an offer of £2 for the job, though if pushed hard enough he will go as high as £4. He'd prefer not to pay anything up front, but will go up to £1, but not more than 1/4 of the final price. Once a price is agreed on the pair will arrange to meet with the PCs in a couple of days to settle up.

tracking down ward

Jason Ward is not the easiest man to find, though he's not sticking to the hideout that Andy Mickay arranged for him. Instead he's knocking around Forest Green, one of the poorer areas of Mire End, trying to keep himself entertained. Not too clever, but there you go. He's got money from the fight he won and he's very bored.

Ward spends his mornings in his flat, generally sleeping late. He then wanders around the local area, chatting with the few friends he has made in the past week. By the early afternoon he is usually in one of the local pubs with one or two of his friends. When the pub closes at three they go round to someone's flat and get wrecked on nebelweed. It's not much of a life, but it's better than nothing.

Tracking Ward

There are three main ways the characters could track Ward down. The first is basic legwork, hitting the pubs and other gathering places around Mire End asking people if they've seen the young fighter from the description provided by Scree and Arthur. This is probably the slowest method of finding Ward as there are a lot of low pubs in Mire End (in fact, every pub in Mire End is a low pub). The characters will also have to be very careful if they want to avoid Ward finding out that someone is looking for him. They might not want to avoid this of course, and if you are using the 3rd Syndicate Infiltrator version of Ward he will likely try and make himself easier to find though he has few resources to do so.

Another way to track down Ward is through Mickay (see Issue 3 of the Mire End Tribune for further information on Mickay). Scree and Arthur can provide an address and a list of the fight promoter's favourite hangouts. The address is for a battered office/flat that Mickay organises his fight cards from and the hangouts are a pub, a bookies and a brothel close to the flat.



Mickay is conscious of the fact he's promoting something not everyone approves of, and that people who lose money betting on his fights may just want to take their frustration out on the booker. For this reason he keeps a couple of bodyguards (usually cripplecut fighters who owe him for one reason or another) with him at all times. This makes Mickay a hard man to intimidate, let alone beat up for information. Indeed trying something of that sort would be profoundly stupid as Mickay is well connected and will certainly seek revenge for any attack.

The best way to get information about Ward's whereabouts from Mickay would be to pose as a stringer (perhaps from the Mire End Tribune or the The Clarion, one of the less reputable TCMA-wide papers) wanting to interview Ward for a piece on cripplecut. The characters would have to be convincing, especially as to the tone of the piece as Mickay is wary about stringers, having been burned by hostile articles before (mainly in the Mire End Tribune). It is unlikely that Mickay would tell the characters where Ward is hiding though he would certainly be willing to set up a meeting if convinced the character's intentions coincide with his interests.

The last method of tracking Ward down is subtler legwork. There are plenty of other cripplecut fighters who met Ward at the Shale Hall fights, though few spoke much to Ward. They do know that Mickay spirited him away after the fights, but not where to. If the characters talk to the fighters or some of the guys who helped out behind the scenes at Shale Hall they will eventually be directed to Gil Harwood, a key member of Mickay's organisation. Gil was sent to take a message to one of Mickay's old friends after the Shale Hall fights and if suitably lubricated can give a name, Marc Fortune (see the section entitled 'Personalities').

Fortune has something of a reputation around Mire End. He owns a large number of decrepit flats in the more run-down areas of Mire End for which he charges the desperate extortionate rents. The majority of these are in Forrest Green, which would narrow the legwork hunt down somewhat, but it should be obvious that Mickay has arranged a hideaway through Fortune. Now all that needs to be done is find out where. Fortune himself is out of the PC's league, being heav-

ily connected with the Hohler gang, but an enterprising group could find a way of getting to see his records, possibly by bribing one of the people who work in his 'office' or even by breaking in to the 'office' themselves.

Of course role-players being the inventive people they are they could easily come up with something themselves, or combine the methods described above.

Ward's reaction to an attack will depend on if the adventure is used on it's own or as part of a continuing campaign. In a singular adventure Ward will fight back viciously, quite possibly with lethal force if he feels his own life threatened.

In a longer campaign he will be more concerned with protecting himself from serious harm while making the beating he takes look good. He will do his best to land a few good shots of his own, but he won't actually try to kill anyone.

Locations

Ward's flat

Ward has one of three rooms over an abandoned shop. The entrance is round the back, a steel plated door covered in rust and ankle deep in water.

The rickety stairs lead up to the kitchen past the bathroom. From the kitchen there are the stairs to the third floor and the door to Ward's room. The building is owned by one of Mickay's old cohorts from his gang days (Marc Fortune).

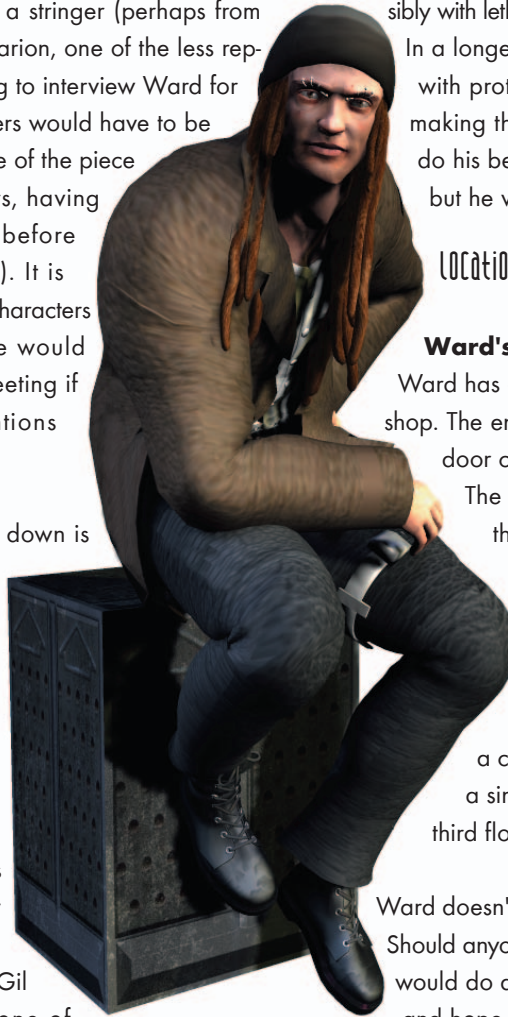
He shares a kitchen and bathroom with a couple who rent the room above his and a single guy who has the back room on the third floor.

Ward doesn't talk to any of the other residents much. Should anyone break in and attack him none of them would do anything more than cower in their rooms and hope they're not next.

The Gaslight

The Gaslight Tavern, more usually known simply just as the Gaslight is a fairly rough pub in the Forest Green area of Mire End. It's Ward's preferred watering hole and the few friends he has who would stand by him if anything kicks off will be there any time he is.

Physically, the Gaslight is a two-story brick building with a high pointed roof that stands out among the surrounding three story buildings. The bars are on the second floor, with the ground floor bricked up as a cellar. There are two bars,



the first is the larger with card table and dartboard while the second is a snug that is far more private. Ward and his friends hang out in the larger bar most of the time.

The Gaslight is probably the worst place to pick a fight with Ward. Even without his friends getting involved, the regulars will not take kindly to new faces starting trouble in their local.

The Locomotive

Another Mire End pub. Though not as rough as the Gaslight it is not exactly the safest place in The City. It is owned by Vince Creavy, the uncle of Terry Creavey, one of the sample PCs. Just around the corner from the abandoned Mire End Station, it is a popular, raucous place. Rumour has it that several people who help compile the Mire End Tribune drink in the Locomotive, and political debate is often heard in the snug of an evening.

personalities

Note: Alternate versions of two characters (Jason Ward and Adam Winterman) are given here. It is up to the GM which version to use. The first version of the character is intended for use if you intend to run this as a stand-alone adventure, whereas the second version is for use in an ongoing campaign that will follow on from the events in this adventure.

Jason Ward - Ghostfighter looking for a better life

Age: 22
Height: 6'1"
Weight: 13st 3lbs
Eyes: Grey
Hair: Scruffy brown dreadlocks
Affiliations: None

AGL:	50	AWR:	65
DEX:	60	INT:	60
HLT:	70	PER:	40
STR:	55	WIL:	50

Skills

Pistol	35%	Climbing	30%
Unarmed	55%	Hide	30%
Sneak	65%	Shadow	30%
Foraging	35%	Fishing	30%
Fast Talk	40%	First Aid	35%
Criminal Culture	40%	Act	30%
Armed Combat	60%		
Knife	+20%		
Thrown Weapon	30%		
Tactics	30%		
Running	30%		

Advantages & Disadvantages (If Marked * the advantage applies only to the extended version)

Fame	Minor
Enemy (Scree & Arthur)	Moderate
Arrogance	Minor
Contact (3rd Syndicate)	Major*
Contact (3rd Syndicate)	Minor (Several)*

Gear

2 LIVES
Sparklock Pistol and ammo
Mail Shirt
Lowtech First Aid Kit
10yds of Hightech Rope & Grapple
Clothes
£2 in cash

Growing up in Fogwarren wasn't easy. Ward not only grew up, but thrived there. As a child he was a fighter, and a good one too. Ward would take on kids much older than himself in the vicious struggles for the smallest scraps of food, and regularly beat them.

Ward realised early that a good fighter could make money and so he set about learning what would become his trade. He worked as an enforcer for gangs, as a bouncer for brothels and betting parlours, anything that gave him the chance to see and participate in fights. Ward quickly realised that people enjoyed watching others fight, and that the more dramatic the fight the more excited they would become. He dallied in cripplecut but the money didn't seem to match the risk, at least in Fogwarren.

It was one of his regular security jobs for a bookie that provided Ward with his big break. Andy Mickay was arranging some odds for one of his events when a disgruntled customer pulled a cartridge pistol and demanded the counter staff return the money he'd lost. Ward's swift disarming and subduing of the customer without anyone being seriously injured impressed Mickay, who offered the young ghostfighter a chance to make much more money without the risk of getting shot. Ward jumped at the opportunity, and when Mackay took his cripplecut tournament back to Mire End, Ward went with him to start his new career.

Jason Ward - 3rd Syndicate Infiltrator

Affiliations: 3rd Syndicate

The general information above still applies, but early in his career Ward came to the attention of the 3rd Syndicate while working on the door of a brothel they controlled. Impressed by his tenacity and willingness to do what the other guy



would not, Ward was inducted into the Fogwarren Assembly and rose rapidly through the ranks. When the opportunity arose to use Andy Mickay as a link into the Hohler Gang, Ward's youth and fighting skills made him a good choice for the job.

The fight in the gambling den was staged to attract Mickay's attention and the plan is working well so far, as Ward's victory over Oshay has certainly caught the attention of several people inside the Hohler Gang hierarchy.

Karl Hooper - Local Cripplecut Enthusiast

Age: 27

Height: 5'10"

Weight: 11st 6lbs

Eyes: Blue

Hair: Mousy Blonde

Affiliations: None

Karl was at the Shale Hall fights where Ward debuted and was impressed by the wiry kid out of Fogwarren. About a week later he was shocked when he walked into his local and noticed the same kid nursing a flagon in one of the darker corners. Aware of the reputations cripplecut fighters often feel the need to maintain, Hooper was polite, offering congratulations on the fight and to buy Ward's next drink. To his delight Ward was open and friendly.

Karl is Ward's closest friend in Mire End (though that's not exactly a huge field). All Ward's other friends are people he's met through Hooper. While Karl would want to help Ward out if a fight broke out in his presence he is not much use unless he could get a broken bottle and the drop on an assailant.

Adam Winterman - Pub Owner

Age: 41

Height: 6'

Weight: 14st 9lbs

Eyes: Green

Hair: Brown

Affiliations: None

The proprietor of The Gaslight. While not exactly a friend of Ward's he is appreciative of the money the young ghost-fighter spends and is protective of his premises. He keeps a sparklock blunderbuss under the bar in case of trouble though he has not needed it in years, as the Gaslight's regulars include several tidy types who ensure that anyone who does start trouble regrets it in a fairly short order.

Adam Winterman - Hohler Gang middleman

Affiliations: Hohler Gang

The information above still applies, but the Gaslight also serves as a local centre for Hohler Gang activities. Mostly this involves storing contraband goods ready for transport across the nearby Green Canal into the TCMA. The heavies who frequent the Gaslight are in fact Hohler Gang enforcers who prop up the bar as a cover for protecting those goods. Winterman is impressed by Ward's attitude and what he has heard of the young Ghostfighter's abilities and has passed a good report on to the superiors who asked him to take a look at Ward.

Ward's Friends - Young Forest Green residents

Most of the younger guys who hang out in the Gaslight are friendly with Ward and Hooper. Their closer friends should be roughly equal in number to the player characters.

Gil Harwood - Jack-of-all-trades

Age: 26

Height: 5'10

Weight: 12st 9lbs

Eyes: Brown

Hair: Mousy Blonde

Affiliations: Andy Mickay

Gil works for Andy Mickay, doing all the little jobs that keep things running behind the scenes of the shows. Gil also runs errands for Mickay and knows almost everything that his boss does. Gil is trustworthy enough but he's a bit of a gossip, especially when he's had a drink or two.

Marc Fortune - Slum Landlord

Age: 37

Height: 5'7"

Weight: 18st 4lbs

Eyes: Black

Hair: Dark Brown

Affiliations: Leader of his own faction of the Hohler Gang

Back in his gang days Andy Mickay idolised Marc Fortune. The older boy was one of the leaders of the gang and a tough, vicious bastard even by the standards of Mire End. Many of Mickay's games were invented to impress Fortune, and the flattery of the younger man pandered to Fortune's ego, and he rather took a liking to Mickay.

Fortune moved on from the street gang to bigger and better things, from working as an enforcer in housing rackets for the Hohler Gang and finally to running his own rackets alongside his gang activities. He is a big man in Mire End and he



knows it, parading around like a young prince and holding court in the local halls and clubs. He plays a minor role in this adventure but his role will become more important should this adventure be used in a full campaign.

Victor Scree

Age: 22

Height: 5'9"

Weight: 14st 2lbs

Eyes: Green

Hair: Mousy Blonde

Affiliations: Hohler Gang

Scree is a doer rather than a thinker, a fact that has defined his role within the Hohler Gang and society at large. A solid, uncomplicated man with little in the way of compassion for his fellow human beings but a love of money, or at least the things money gets you. He is actually slightly brighter than Arthur, though this will only show itself in terms of a certain low cunning.

Tony Arthur

Age: 23

Height: 6'1"

Weight: 13st 8lbs

Eyes: Grey

Hair: Black

Affiliations: Hohler Gang

The best way to describe Tony is an extremely nasty piece of work. He's a schemer, with an extremely long memory for any sort of slight and an unpleasant temper to match. Words like psychotic are also pretty accurate. It's not that he's had a particularly tough life, he's just one of those people who was born with a mean streak as wide as the Green Canal.

Arthur is the talker of the pair, and in keeping with his basic character he is very mouthy. Fortunately for him he's tough enough to back it up most of the time. This has, however, led to an impressive collection of scars.

SAMPLE PLAYER CHARACTERS

Note: Simon Stark has a lot in common with Jason Ward. This is entirely deliberate and will be important in a long term campaign.. The Character types are given for those who would rather create their own characters based on these basic templates. If you do choose this option the GM should ensure that no Player Character starts with a skill above 60% (70% with a Specialisation).

Terry Creavey

Age: 20

Affiliations: None

Nothing in Terry Creavey's early life would suggest that he'd end up in the slums of Mire End. The son of a Transit Militia sergeant stationed at Folly Hills Central Station, Terry's early childhood was comfortable, if not luxurious. He had a basic education, regular meals and a decent enough place to live. Many people in The City would kill for such advantages, and when Terry was nine someone did. Terry's parents were murdered in a bungled mugging. The Provosts caught the murderers who 'died accidentally in custody' but that was small comfort for a child made suddenly homeless.

Creavey was lucky. His uncle on his mother's side was willing to take him in and while he had to earn his keep by helping out in the family's pub it was in many ways a far better life than he would have had in a TCMA orphanage. While his formal education was entirely neglected Terry used his free time to explore his new environment, finding his way on the drowned streets of Mire End and making a number of good friends. As he's grown up, his network of acquaintances has expanded, and he has made a few good contacts through his uncle's pub. All in all he has the makings of a decent lostfinder.

Creavey is the nucleus of the group and not only because they hang out in his uncle's pub. Creavey is a solid, dependable guy and that dependability makes him the glue that holds the group together in a crisis. Granted, the troubles the four have so far faced have all been trivial, but this quality should shine through.

Lower Middle Class, Independently Minded, Lostfinder

Anna Heart

Age: 20

Affiliations: None

Work hard. Pray. Obey the priests. Learn the lore. These were the mantras with which the young Anna Heart grew up. Days spent in a Third Church tabernacle, perched on the knee of a stern Deacon into whose care her parents abandoned her at every opportunity, nights spent dreaming of something other than the bleakness of her existence and the stern old man who smelt of damp and nebelweed. The spark of faith that her parents wished so desperately to ignite was never born.

Like many who grow up with faith forced upon them, Anna spent her childhood going through the motions in order to maintain her parents' approval. She could easily recite by



rote the canon of the Third Church by her tenth birthday, even if she never really learned to read. As she got older though, the mechanical nature of her 'belief' began to wear on her, leaving her wondering if there were nothing more to life than the mindless drudgery that seemed to encompass her whole world. It was this ennui that led her to early enlistment in the Lay Reserves Martial, which ironically was the breaking of what vestiges of faith she ever had. Her exposure to the world outside the narrow confines of the Third Church has given her a lust for life and a desire to experience as much of it as she can.

Anna is a bit of an outsider to the group, having met the other three only a couple of months ago on her first visit to a pub. She likes them well enough, but she only gets to see them on her leave and what few breaks she can arrange in her schedule. Her frustration with this state of affairs is likely to lead to her final abandonment of the Third Church if she can see a clear chance to make a living in the outside world.

Drudge, Religious, Military (Lay Reserves Martial)

Simon Stark

Age: 19

Affiliations: None

It's tough on the streets of Mire End. Scraping together enough to survive is a constant battle. A childhood spent in those circumstances is hardly an idyllic one, but it is certainly one that prepares you for the harsh reality of life in The City. Simon joined his first gang aged 5. A small, nimble and slightly brighter than average child he was useful to the older kids because he could climb well and fit through small gaps. He also got a reputation as a vicious little fighter who wasn't afraid to take on older and larger kids.

Stark doesn't exactly like to fight, but he's good at it and he relishes doing things he's good at. He's moderately amoral, so if the chance to make money by fighting came his way there's a good chance he'd take it. He's very interested in cripplecut as it seems to offer what he wants without a lot of the moral ambiguities his friends seem so concerned about. He attends most local fights, including the recent one at Shale Hall.

Simon has been coming to the Locomotive for years. He and Creavey pretty much grew up together and they are close. He's not so close to Ryan as he finds the serious, bookish young man a bit odd. He has a soft spot for Anna which may develop further but for now is something he keeps to himself.

Dispossessed, Criminal, Criminal

Ryan Chase

Age: 20

Affiliations: None

There are few dinginsmiths in Mire End, and little demand for their work if the truth be known. Ryan Chase's father was such a dinginsmith. His situation was made worse by a brief and rather eccentric idea that he didn't need to pay his protection money to the Hohler Gang. So they beat him and burned down his shop. Young Ryan wasn't present at the time, but it left a scar on him nonetheless. It took months for his father to recover; meaning 10-year-old Ryan was the main breadwinner for his family.

This brief experience of responsibility left a lasting mark on Ryan, helping him develop into a serious young man who applied himself to his studies, learning his father's craft well, and studied beyond them into the use of dingins, becoming an accomplished programmer, and something of a flowghost.

Ryan first came to the Locomotive with his father, who hoped to bring his slightly withdrawn son out of himself. While initially not too keen on the experience Ryan started to warm to the pub when he made friends with Creavey and Stark, the only people his own age who he'd really spent time with to that point. Ryan can be quiet, but if he's on a subject he is confident about it can be difficult to shut him up.

Lower Middle Class, Apprenticed, Flowghost

